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AUTHOR Grant, Dale F.; Jackson, Mary H.
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ABSTRACT

Virtually every level of compulsory education features a Career Day program as part of a school's career guidance efforts. This paper proposes that Career Day programs can be improved to meet the career explorations and school-to-work needs of today's students. It advocates that the content of such programs be broadened so as to include more of the subtle aspects of career exploration and the job search process. All students, not just those who are college-bound, need career counseling. Likewise, literature reviews suggest that students need different kinds of help and that all students should be encouraged to gather information about careers and be able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Career Day programs can help meet students' needs by the increased use of role models. Since self-assessment includes grasping an understanding of interests, abilities, and aptitudes, role models can be invited to address how their interests, abilities, and aptitudes have influenced their career decisions. These experiences may be related to the classroom, to extra-curricular activities, or to a mentor. Role models can be used in a variety of formats, from presenting factual information, to using "how-to" strategies while sharing job description information. (RJM)

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Career Day Programs For Today's Youth

Dale F. Grant, Ph. D. and Mary H. Jackson, Ed. D.

Assistant Professors

Georgia Southern University

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Career Day Programs For Today's Youth

Career Day programs are common components of career guidance efforts at virtually every level of compulsory education. Traditionally, career day programs have focused on providing job description and training information to students through presentations by role models from the local community. Counselors have selected presenters on the basis of career interests of students and have attempted to represent the variety of jobs available in their communities. As student populations have become more ethnically diverse and as job opportunities for men and women have broadened in our society, many counselors have responded to these changes by selecting role models to reflect the ethnic diversity of the school and nontraditional employment opportunities. The purpose of this article is to propose that career day programs can be used to better meet the career exploration and school to work needs of today's students by broadening the content to include more of the subtle aspects of career exploration and the job search process.

The world of work each of today's students will enter requires a higher level of education for entry than was true for previous generations. It is estimated that over 80% of new jobs will require some post secondary education (Sukiennik, Raufman, Bendat, 1992). The workplace itself is dynamic being influenced by changes in technology, job obsolescence, and an international marketplace, to name a few. Other influences include more female workers and those from different cultural backgrounds. Stress, job insecurity, and job change are commonplace.

Although assistance with career concerns are considered appropriate by teachers (Gibson, 1990), students (Burknett, 1993) and school counselors (Miller, 1988), it has been argued that college bound students receive most of the career assistance (Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Peer, 1985). Lee and Ekstrom (1987) point out that

even though all high school students face career decisions, students in the general curriculum track with the least focus for after school plans and students who are disadvantaged because of their social class and/or with minority status had the least contact with counselors. This imbalance is further exacerbated since the families of these students are likely to have lower levels of educational achievement, less access to work experiences and less general exposure and are thus less likely to have the information to assist their children. The proposed Career Day format provides access and the proposed changes broaden students knowledge base.

A study of adults which included African Americans, Asian-Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and Whites found the need for strengthening career development services to include both access to and quality of career information in school systems (Brown, Minor, Jepsen, 1991).

The literature also suggests that in addition to access concerns, the career development needs of students are different. Career development concerns associated with the gifted are: multipotentiality, pressure from the expectations of others, a lack of adult role models, being a gifted and talented female (Clark, 1988; Herr & Watanabe, cited in Colangelo & Zaffran, 1979). Regarding multipotentiality, for example, gifted students experience difficulty with career decisions because career options are not eliminated based on achievement since there are no "low" achievement areas. Sproles (1988) reports that students who seek training in vocational programs not traditionally associated with their gender face this bias as a barrier. Bloch (1991) reports that career information is a helpful component of programs designed to meet the needs of at-risk students.

Although the influences on every individual's career decision are unique to them, theoretically, the process is the same and gathering meaningful information

is an important step. Based on the developmental approaches to career choice like that of Super (in Isaacson, 1985), the career exploration stage of career development begins for most people with the middle school years and lasts for several years until the individual begins to narrow his/her choices leading to a career decision and implementation. During this stage students are discovering their likes and dislikes, their capacities, abilities, skills, personality characteristics, etc. This self-assessment then leads, theoretically, to an appropriate decision regarding career choices. Appropriateness is basically determined by goodness of fit with knowledge of specific job choices within the world of work and self-assessment. Knowledge of the components of the process provides the base for broadening the content of Career Day programs and thus increasing the attractiveness and effectiveness of programs for the larger and move diverse segments of a school's population.

Knowledge of self becomes meaningful when integrated with knowledge of the world of work and leads to informed choices. However, assessing information about self and the work world and then utilizing the decision process is not an easy task for today's youth. Much of the knowledge of self and the work world is learned via observation, from experiences, and from one's successes and failures in and outside of the classroom and the workplace. In addition to just the identification of information, there are the connecting questions of relevance and relatedness. Role models can be meaningful disseminators of information and can influence the behavior of others when they are viewed as competent, respected, powerful, attractive and their behavior is relevant to the observers situation (Ormrod, 1990). Since one can learn from the experiences of others and relate those experiences to self, role models can be effective teachers. As individual students are exposed to multiple role models relating multiple aspects of the career decision process, then

the cumulative effect would be broader based career decisions on the part of larger segments of the population. The changes proposed for Career Day programs require increased coordination with teachers and content changes in the presentations of role models. The basic format for Career Day programs may be unchanged in most cases.

The suggestions which follow are examples of how role models can enhance career development in three areas: self-assessment as it relates to world of work, how-to strategies, and the problem-solving while also sharing information regarding the nature of their work and work environment. The availability of computerized career information systems reduce the need for role models to provide extensive job description information, and makes these suggestions viable.

Since self-assessment includes grasping an understanding of our interests, abilities, aptitudes, values and characteristics of our personality and then fitting those features of ourselves with realistic and attractive job options, role models can be invited to address how their interests, abilities, and aptitudes have influenced their career decisions. They can share some of the significant influences, both positive and negative, on their choices. These experiences may be related to the classroom, to extra-curricula activities, or to a mentor in their lives. An example that comes to mind is that of a professional orator who shared how her love of talking would get her into "trouble" in some classes with some teachers; her point being that those teachers would not have anticipated that she would make her living using her ability and interest in talking. They did not offer that alternative to her. By sharing experiences, role models provide the opportunity for students to see the relevance of personal strengths/weaknesses to career choice.

Role models can share with youth how their interests and priorities have

changed since their days in school. Changing circumstances, such as marriage and the birth of children instigate changes in our priorities. They can discuss how their personality and their values fit with the expectations of their jobs. Sharing these kinds of experiences can, by example, assist students with understanding how self-assessment is related to career choice. In subtle ways, an orientation toward planning for the future can be addressed by helping students to anticipate.

Job descriptions as typical components of career day programs can be enhanced by connecting them to the current educational experience of students. Since "a job is a series of tasks and activities that are performed within the scope of what we call work" (Sukiennik, Raufman, Bendat, 1992), then the acquisition of the necessary training to perform the tasks or activities is important. By sharing information about their training paths and discussing how they use the knowledge learned at the current level of their audience in their current positions, the classroom experience is related to the world of work. Thus, the relevance of the curriculum to the world of work and transferable skills are highlighted. To the extent that the role models are comfortable, they may be invited to share how they overcame barriers; or how some barriers, experiences, or circumstances lead to changes in their career objectives and training paths. In addition, many role models are in nontraditional careers for their gender and have therefore resolved conflicts with traditional expectations. Workers have adjusted to change, benefited from persistence in educational pursuits and the job search process, moved from less satisfactory to more satisfactory training options and/or jobs, etc. Many successfully employed adults have not followed "crystal ball" paths, they are problem solvers.

Having knowledge of self and the work world to make informed decisions regarding training needs with the subsequent completion of that training leads one

to the point of being employable. Thus, the need for job search skills. Being employable does not necessarily make one placeable. Sinick (in Power, 1991) makes a distinction: one is employable when one has the requisite skills and work personality necessary to perform the job and one is placeable when one also has the ability to be perceived as attractive to the employer.

Being employable includes being competent in job task related skills, possessing appropriate workplace social skills and work adjustment skills, and demonstrating effective interview skills (Power, 1991). Being placeable includes the ability to present self well in the application and interview process, to be persistent in the job search process, to understand the availability of jobs, wages, and rules within the workplace, and to find and follow up on job leads (Power, 1991). All of these aspects of the world of work can be addressed by persons employed in the area of human resources. In addition, human resource personnel can assist students in relating many in-school behavior expectations to the world of work; punctuality, regular attendance, conflict resolution skills, getting along with others, being responsible and reliable, and the ability to respond to constructive criticism are all valuable transferable skills.

Role models can use a variety of formats from presenting factual information to using "how-to" strategies while sharing job description information. Human resource personnel can address how to apply, interview, search, present oneself, etc. Other topics which can be addressed by role models could include: the impact of career choice on lifestyle, how to handle job related stress, how to manage the demands of a family with work related responsibilities, and on and on. Thus, a number of the components of career exploration, in preparation for decision making and implementation, can be presented by employed persons serving as role

models for students, thereby broadening students' knowledge bases. Needless to say, decisions will need to be made regarding which selected areas are most appropriate for the student audience.

In conclusion, just as there is a limitless number of jobs which can be described by role models, there also are a number of aspects of self-assessment, the nature of world of work and influences on the decision process which can be shared, illustrating how to and problem-solving strategies. Implementing career day programs with the proposed modifications will not be a panacea, but it would provide more breath to the information available to students by increasing their exposure to multiple components of the career exploration and implementation processes and how these components are related.

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